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ABSTRACT

Outlining the general historical, legal, and educational context within which Canadian Indian education developed, this monograph addresses the following topics: (1) Federal Responsibility for Indian Education (the Royal Proclamation of 1763; the Indian Act of 1876; treaties, etc.); (2) Provincial Involvement in Indian Education (revision of the Indian Act and initiation of the Joint School Program, a policy which ultimately transferred all responsibility for Indian education to the provinces); (3) A Search For Educational Legitimacy (in view of the failures of policy makers and "experts", legitimate Indian education must be relevant to and supported by the Indian community); (4) Some Criteria for an Alternative (community control; parental involvement and alliance with teachers who are responsible to the community; positive psychological impact on children via role models, cultural recognition, and elimination of standardized tests; instructional materials that accurately reflect past and present Indian experiences); (5) Alternative Model (the school perceived as only part of a community, social, cultural, recreational "learning center", serving as the focal point of community life and providing comprehensive community education); (6) Teachers and Community (a tripartite teaching role involving instruction, curriculum development, and community involvement via the retraining of "professional" educators). (JC)

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MONOGRAPH NO. SEVEN

A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION: LOCAL CONTROL AT JAMES SMITH RESERVE

by

SOLOMON SANDERSON

This address was presented by Solomon Sanderson, Chief of the James Smith Band and First Vice-President of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, in the Indian and Northern Dialogue Series, at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, on March 13, 1975.

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The purpose of this monograph is to share information and ideas associated with Indian and northern education.

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A Model For Community Education:

Local Control At James Smith Reserve

by

Solomon Sanderson

FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIAN EDUCATION

The principle that the federal government has sole responsibility for Indian people dates back at least to the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This document, often called "the Magna Carta of the Canadian Indian", forbade the private purchase of Indian lands, reserving this right to the Crown. The British North America Act of 1867 simply reaffirmed a responsibility accepted by British governments for over a century. The B.N.A. Act, Section 91, Subsection 24, spells out that "Indians and the lands reserved for Indians are one of the matters under the exclusive legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada".

Treaties

Treaties between our nations and the Canadian nation guarantee to us, in perpetuity, certain things. One of the things guaranteed is education.

Contrary to popular belief, education is not "free" for Indians. Our education was paid for in advance and it is one of the items we accepted in exchange for the land and the resources which have produced the wealth of the Canadian nation. We have always honoured our part of the bargain. We are hopeful that the Canadian nation will eventually honour their part of that bargain.

The Indian Act

Allegedly to carry out the responsibilities specified in the B.N.A. Act and to fulfill the obligations entered into in treaties with our nations, the first Indian Act was passed in 1876. Under this Act, the position of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs was created, a position that still exists. The duties of the position are carried out by the minister of the department responsible for administering the Act.

I say allegedly to carry out its responsibilities because it is clear that the government never intended to honour commitments made in the treaties and legal responsibilities spelled out in the B.N.A. Act. To this day governments maintain a consistent approach designed to destroy our treaties, disolve our special status, do away with our reserves and deny us our rightful legal place in society. However, we can debate that issue on another stage, at another time -- or deal with it in the question period which is to follow.

Our position is that we have special status and special rights guaranteed to us by our treaties and by the constitution. The Indian Act is the legislative authority for administering those rights and provincial governments have no constitutional authority to pass legislation for Indians.

More recently, the federal government has, by passing three separate Treasury Board minutes, given authority to Band councils to control education programs.

These, then, are the major foundations upon which we base our claim to the right to decide our own educational destiny. Of course, one of the major stumbling blocks is the provincial education system.

PROVINCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN INDIAN EDUCATION

From 1867 to 1951, provincial governments w[illegible] almost totally uninvolved in Indian education.

In 1947 the federal government adopted a new policy entitled "A Plan to Liquidate Canada's Indian Problem in Twenty-Five Years". The intent of the plan was to eliminate special status for Indians, do away with reserves, transplant Indians to the cities and eventually eliminate the Indian Act. Subsection 24 of Section 91 of the B.N.A. Act could then be repealed, the treaties could be forgotten, and Canada would no longer have citizens known as Indians.

In 1951, a sweeping revision of the Indian Act was passed and this, to this day, remains the cornerstone for the elimination of Indian rights in Canada. The revision permitted the federal government to enter into tuition agreements with local boards and master agreements with the provinces for the education of Indian children.

This marked the beginning of a major thrust by Indian Affairs to sign as many tuition agreements as possible, as quickly as possible. The results of this thrust have become known as the Joint School Program.

Of course, the intent was clear. First, sign the joint agreements; second, transfer authority for Indian education to the provinces; finally, with education transferred, transfer all other responsibility for Indians to the provinces.

The 1969 "White Paper on Indian Affairs" was simply a five-year plan to wrap up what had been adopted as government policy in 1947 and written into the Indian Act in 1951. The major tools of that policy were the Joint School Agreements.

It is worth noting that, prior to 1951, chiefs and band councils had the authority to make rules and regulations concerning construction, maintenance and repair of schools, the authority to regulate the hiring of teachers, establish separate schools, and make attendance regulations, inspect the schools and determine programs. The revised Indian Act of 1957 removed all these powers except the right to specify the religious denomination of teachers and request separate schools on religious grounds.

What we have been engaged in at James Smith for the past two years and what Indian people are engaged in at Thunderchild, Little Pine, Poundmaker, Red Pheasant, Sturgeon Lake, File Hills and other reserves in Saskatchewan involves much more, then, than simply controlling a school. It involves our very survival as Indian people.

A SEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL LEGITIMACY

At James Smith, as in many other Indian communities, we have had to assess the results in terms of its impact on our total community, of the Joint School Program initiated by that 1951 revision to the Indian Act.

The educational questions and issues we raise today are substantially different from the traditional concern of experts. We are questioning the legitimacy of non-Indian education institutions; we no longer believe that it is sufficient simply to increase the effectiveness of those institutions. This difference can cause some tension between those of us who represent the victims of educational policies and practices and those who believe it is still possible to make the existing programs operable. We are focusing as much on Indian language and culture as on verbal and arithmetic skills. Some Indian people, including

ourselves as representatives of the James Smith Band, are thinking of entirely new comprehensive forms of community education based on substantially different values.

We are fully aware that one of the first concerns expressed by non-Indians - and a number of Indians - is that of "integrated" vs "segregated" education. The rhetoric of race and education is filled with a number of similar, meaningless debates. The supporters of so-called "integration" see a positive academic and social values in racially mixed classrooms. To these people integration equals quality. Some even say it equals "equality".

It is our contention that Indian people will assure their rightful role as citizens of special status when we have the means to guarantee that status - not simply because non-Indians grant it to us. Local control of our education programs is one of the ways we can develop those means.

The Joint School Program was simply one aspect of a comprehensive plan to do away with our special status. Public defense of the system is based on the idea that racism in Canada is based on attitude alone. Added to this is the argument that those attitudes will change if Indian and white children attend school together.

The Joint School Program has failed. The motives for initiating the program were wrong and it dealt with only some minor symptoms of the real problem.

Integrated vs non-integrated education is not a question we consider worthy of debate. We are motivated by a desire to implement an approach to education which is relevant to Indian people.

Society cannot continue to write reports accurately describing the failure of education institutions for Indian people without taking into account the impact those truths will have on Indian communities. There comes a point where it is no longer possible to merely propose more stepped-up measures to overcome failures - especially when the proposals come from the same people who administered unacceptable and dysfunctional policies and systems. Professor Seymour Martin Lipsett once wrote:

> Legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society. The extent to which contemporary democratic political systems are legitimate depends in large measure upon the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved. While effectiveness is primarily instrumental, legitimacy is evaluate. Groups regard a political system as legitimate or illegitimate according to the way in which its values fit with theirs.[1]

And in another place he has written:

> All claims to a legitimate title to rule in new states must ultimately win acceptance through demonstrating effectiveness. The loyalty of the different groups to the system must be won through developing in them the conviction that this system is the best - or at least an excellent - way to accomplish their objectives. And even claims to legitimacy of a supernatural sort, such as "the gift of grace", are subjected on the part of the populace to a highly pragmatic test - that is, what is the pay-off?[2]

For our community, over the past one hundred years, there has been little payoff from the educational systems and programs conceived, implemented and managed by non-Indians. Two years ago, in the face of the last

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1 Lipsett, Seymour Martin. Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics, New York, Doubleday, 1963, p. 64.

2 Lipsett, Seymour Martin. The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective. New York, Basic Books, 1963, p. 45-46.

of a long history of unpleasant experiences at the Joint School in Kinistino, our band decided to develop its own education system.

With the end product (i.e. 97 percent of Indian children not completing high school) clearly before our eyes at home and with volumes of reports documenting lack of payoff, it is not difficult to conclude that we had good reason to question the legitimacy of existing educational systems.

We question the entire process because we are aware that the schools, while not educating our children, have at the same time supported a particularly unacceptable situation. We know that schools are one of the major institutions for assimilating our children into the dominant structure of the society, forgetting their status and the basis of that status.

The relevance of all this is that policy-makers and their advisers must recognize that there is a point, already reached, beyond which vast numbers of Indian people become alienated and no longer view efforts on our behalf, however well-intentioned, as legitimate.

In order for a program to work, support for that program must exist in the Indian community. This means that educational achievement must be defined more broadly than as the mere acquisition of verbal and mathematical skills. Many Indian parents are extremely concerned about what happens to the self image of Indian children in contemporary schools - schools which, whether they are attended by a majority or minority of Indian children, reflect dominant white values and morals. Are these schools prepared to deal with their own white racism? Probably not, and a few university classes for white, middle-class teachers cannot prepare

them to do so. Are these schools prepared to come to terms with the young Indian child's search for identity? Will the Indian child acquire certain skills which show up favourably on standardized tests, but at the same time avoid coming to grips with the fact that he or she should not attempt to be a carbon copy of the culture of other racial and ethnic groups? Virtually all the social scientists, education experts and public policy-makers who emphasize integration overlook this crucial, intangible, psychological factor. We, as concerned Indian leaders and parents, do not overlook it. Our viewpoint has nothing to do with Indian people wanting to perpetuate "separate but unequal" facilities or with attitudes of "Red Power". Our concern is simply a necessary reaction to the fact that many white (and Indian) liberal, integration-oriented spokesmen are tuned in to a particular result and overlook other factors. They fail to understand that their criteria for "educational achievement" simply may not be relevant to our particular situation.

What we are stating (in as kind a manner as possible) is that setting criteria for equal educational opportunity can no longer be left to the established "experts" and bureaucrats. They have proven themselves failures in the eyes of the Indian people. The policy-makers must now take their direction from those for whom they say are operating; which means of course that they must be willing to share the powers of policy-making. The experts must understand that what is high on the government bureaucrat's agenda does not coincide with the agenda of many Indian people.

Some Criteria For An Alternative

It is instructive, then, to examine some of the major items presented by the people of our community as well as other Indian communities. Clearly, one of the more constructive ideas is to take many of our people off the welfare rolls and employ them full time in instructional, clerical, maintenance, library, materials development, day care, transportation, counselling, construction and supervisory occupations in the education program itself. These are people whose children attend the school and people who continue to live, and plan to continue living, in the community.

Our community, along with other Indian communities, has identified a number of particular concerns with regard to the delivery of educational services and these concerns fall into four major areas:

(1) Control. It has been conclusively demonstrated, over and over, that existing federal and provincial education systems are not responsive to the needs and aspirations of Indian communities. Therefore, those structural arrangements now operating should change substantially.

We, as Indian people, having moved to the stage of questioning the very legitimacy of existing systems, are developing ways to create a new system - our own. This is difficult for most Canadians to understand precisely because they assume the continuing legitimacy of the present education systems. Those systems may work for them; they do not work for most of us.

(2) Parental Involvement And Alliance With Teachers. It has become obviously clear that the major agents of control may be the elected representatives of Indian parents in the community and they must be the people to whom teachers are responsible.

Discussion of parental involvement and control has serious implications for the standards of professionalism we adopt. Indian parents might well be impatient with some of the theories of teaching reading and writing. At this stage who can say that our doubts are not valid? The present approaches have hardly proved successful. Therefore, when we get sizeable Indian parental participation, we are opening up the profession to challenge about what constitutes educational legitimacy. No profession welcomes such intrusion from laymen. However, in a community rising to meet long-term problems with innovative approaches, we can expect that everyone involved will be faced with disturbance, disruption and pain as well as with challenge, excitement, job and a sense of moving forward. That is change. This is why we need teachers committed to our ideals, recruited by us and responsible to us. They must be willing to share our pain and our job, our frustrations and our successes and above all they must see our quest as their quest.

(3) Psychological Impact. A third matter of concern to us is the pscychological impact of educational institutions on our children. We must have more Indian people filling responsible roles in our schools if only because they serve as positive role models for our children. Children should be able to see Indian people in day-to-day positions of power and authority.

Schools serve as a major instrument for transmitting an emotional attachment to non-Indian, historical and culture heroes. We are calling for the recognition of such heroes as James Smith, Poundmaker, Big Bear, Joseph Brandt, George Manuel, David Ahenakew, as well as others among our local, provincial and national leaders. To continue to operate on the

false assumption of a common "Canadian" culture is to continue to misunderstand the very deep feeling of alienation in Indian communities.

Who can predict what "tests" will show when we begin to expose Indian children and adults to these kinds of innovations? What sort of impact will this have on the motivation of those "slow learners", those "high risks", those (and here is the misnomer of them all) "culturally deprived"? The legitimacy of the "standardized tests" and of any education system must be questioned as long as they overlook these very essential components.

(4) Instructional Materials. Closely related to the third point is our concern with the kinds and content of materials used. How are Indians portrayed? Do the textbooks accurately reflect the real experience of Indians before and since the birth of the Canadian nation? How is the place, role, and importance of Indian people in contemporary society portrayed?

These are some of the things on our agenda as we consider possible solutions to our vast educational problems. It is far too soon to evaluate the results of many of our proposals - indeed, in many instances the Department of Indian Affairs has adamantly refused to provide us the means to implement them. The proposals we have implemented are in the embryonic stage and have been under continuous harassment and attack by the Department of Indian Affairs before, during and since their initiation.

An Alternative Model

Our model views the "school" as only part of a community social, cultural, recreational and learning centre which is the focal point of community life. The educational system is concerned with the totality of family life, employment opportunities, recreational opportunities, social

and political development, cultural development, parents, senior citizens and all other concerns of community, not simply with children between the ages of 6 and 16. We are planning for a Comprehensive Family-Community Centre with Indian parents attending classes and taking an active part in the day-to-day concerns of community education. Parents are students, teachers, counsellors, bus drivers, janitors and members of the local School Committee which, under the supervision of the chief and council, is the governing body of the school.

We have demonstrated that even operating on a very limited basis, with active resistance and attempts to divide the community and isolate it from other Indian communities being pursued by the Department of Indian Affairs, it is possible for such an institution to gain the trust and participation of the residents of the reserve. We have also shown that such an institution can become not only the centre, but also the initiator of other vital community functions such as health services, economic development, housing, commercial development, road construction, recreational programs, senior citizens programs, day-care programs - all working under the control of the community. This approach provides us with a meaningful chance for participation in the very important day-to-day processes affecting our lives; it gives us educational, vocational, recreational, social, cultural and economic tools and experience for the future. All these things reflect the yearnings of the majority of our people today.

Our plan envisions the Community Centre, of which the school is a part, as a central meeting place to discuss and organize around community issues. All of the establishments functioning under the plan provide relevant groups to which people can relate. At all times our

primary concern is the active involvement of people and their possession of real power to make decisions. We require, however, not only the power to make decisions, but also the means to carry out decisions once made and this is the precise area in which the Department of Indian Affairs appears determined to thwart, frustrate, discredit and defeat our efforts.

Our plan is best understood when one understands that we are questioning and evaluating the legitimacy of the experts in government and universities, who continue to defend the programs for failure that we have been subjected to in the past. We are suggesting that we are at the point in the process of modernization and social transformation when we must begin to think, plan and act in wholly new terms.

We require the services of a different kind of "professional" teacher than places like this have been turning out.

TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY

Though there are many reasons for the long-standing gulf which separated school, community and teacher-training institutions, we suggest that a limited view of teaching plus an inappropriate training model may be primarily at fault. Of course these views have led to other inhibiting practices such as teacher-pupil ratios, funding based on average per pupil expenditures and a host of other centralized, compartmentalized, fragmented myths applied to communities without regard for needs and priorities set by the communities.

Here, I would like to discuss a tripartite teaching role involving instruction, curriculum development and community involvement which

we are trying to develop for our community. In doing so, we recognize that we assign an added responsibility to the school - that of retraining "professional" teachers.

We have had to tackle the problem that, on the one hand, we had parents who were serious about the education of their children, and, on the other hand, we had many schoolmen whose background had made them believe that parents and community were hostile to the school's efforts. The task of overcoming and breaking down such attitudes is an intense and continuing one.

By myth we mean the belief that schoolmen know precisely what kids must be taught, how they should learn and what their "true" nature is.

Frantically trying to establish professionalism and to prevent parental interference, educators have let loose a smokescreen of scientific jargon which obscures rather than clarifies the issues. Over the past six years, thanks to the efforts of Indian organizations, the smokescreen has been lifted to reveal schoolmen trying to cover up professional nakedness by blaming parents for low reading and achievement scores. Thus "professionalism" has been a code word for keeping parents at arm's length, for resisting the development of any meaningful face-to-face contact between school and parent, between teacher and community. When teachers react negatively to inquiries about the performance of youngsters, teachers, or the school, no personal relationships with the broad spectrum of community can materialize.

Bringing community people in the school as paid full-time associate teachers and other workers is one aspect of the solution. Another is hiring community liaison workers as part of the staff. Joint

planning between community leaders and schoolmen is another. None of these, however, deal with the greater need to expand the vision of teachers to see that their role requires active involvement with parents and participation in community life. Unless this is done, the simple infusion of paraprofessionals and community co-ordinators will result only in more intramural squabbling.

Even though we have established community control, we are still dealing with the problem of how to get school personnel more closely and intimately involved with children and their families on a continuing basis. Hiring dedicated people and getting rid of hacks helps, but ultimately we must deal with the fact that most teachers have not previously seen it as their job to know how parents feel about the school.

In order for our teachers to be effective in the contexts we have set for them, they must be given time to play three extremely important roles: instructor, curriculum materials developer, and liaison with the community. This tripartite role arises from the fact that a teacher makes three crucial kinds of decisions each day: in the classroom, he decides what to teach and how to teach it, and in the community he decides how a variety of influences can help his students benefit from education.

Considering instructional decisions first, it is obvious that teachers, with additional support, should expand instruction as never before. With more time available, more experiments with class groupings can be performed; more analysis of teacher and student talk and more individual diagnosis and prescription for students can take place. Instruction need not be exclusively explaining, telling and summarizing. In the area of curriculum decisions, teachers are normally either preempted by a province, district or school-wide course, text and test

prescriptions or forced to scrounge a bit of time in the summer or after school to improvise materials. In the teaching model we have developed, however, the teacher has time to create diverse materials for each of his classes. Without such restructuring, individualized instruction remains just a piety. Reams of instructional materials are essential for individualizing classroom work and the teacher who knows his students and their community first-hand is the logical person to produce these aterials. Teachers must be able to see themselves, their students and the act of teaching in ways that encourage inquiry, analysis and personal growth.

Time also must be made for each of our teachers to familiarize himself with the individual student and the community - the third facet of his tripartite role. Simply stated, effective teaching is intimately related to how well the teacher knows his students and the nature of their surroundings. To be effective, teachers must get out of the school and into the community. They must interact with young people in non-authoritarian settings. They must get to know people in the community. Even though teaching is much more than just instruction, contact with students and community must be made if for no other reason (and there are many others) than to improve the quality of instruction.

The relationships that a teacher can establish with Indian students and parents inside and outside the school setting will create that personal base of information from which a teacher can make critical decisions about instruction and curriculum. More important is what such information and experience can do to perceptions. Except for the bigot, a teacher who knows the community through individuals can sort out assumptions and attitudes about Indians and test them against flesh and blood evidence. For some, initial beliefs may be confirmed; face-to-face

contact might even produce a negative reaction. Our experience, however, is that most teachers, given a comprehensive and supervised experience in learning about themselves and the community, will come to see our people as they are: a diverse group of human beings who have survived geographic, social, economic, political and educational alienation and who have begun the long, determined drive to reclaim their pride, independence and cultural heritage regardless of the problems and resistance encountered along the way.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to outline the general context, historically, legally and educationally, within which we are developing our own school. This approach necessarily leaves out a great deal of detail. We are prepared, however, to answer questions in as much detail as possible.

Arising out of the educational program, and tied to it, are programs in economic development, housing, recreation, agriculture, industry, road construction, counselling, social services and a variety of other areas. We have a long way to go, but I think our band members have demonstrated that we are capable of achieving whatever we put our minds to.